

**Department of Health and Human Services**

**OFFICE OF  
INSPECTOR GENERAL**

**Child Support Enforcement  
State Satisfaction Survey**



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Inspector General**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## PURPOSE

To determine State child support agencies' level of satisfaction with the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement and to identify opportunities to improve its services to the States.

## BACKGROUND

The Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) requested that we survey States to determine their experiences and satisfaction with OCSE and to identify any areas for improvement. This survey was one of the action items identified in a recently completed national Strategic Plan for the Child Support Enforcement Program.

The Child Support Enforcement Program was established in 1975 under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. The goal of this program is to ensure that children are financially supported by both parents; it is administered at the State level and overseen Federally by OCSE. The OCSE has its central office in Washington D.C. and 10 regional offices throughout the country.

We conducted 54 structured telephone interviews in October and November 1997 with respondents from all 50 States, as well as the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands. In most cases, we spoke to the child support program director. We asked respondents to differentiate their answers between the central and regional offices for most questions. We have also selected six States for on-site visits and will present these case studies in a separate follow-up report.

## FINDINGS

### *Most States Are Satisfied Overall*

Forty-seven States are very or somewhat satisfied with OCSE's central office, while seven are somewhat dissatisfied. Similarly, 49 States are very or somewhat satisfied with their regional OCSE office, with only five being somewhat dissatisfied. A majority of States say their satisfaction with OCSE has increased over the past 2 years; 44 say it has increased with the central office and 28 say it has increased with the regional office.

### *States Rate Their Recent Experiences High*

States rate overall communication within the Child Support Enforcement Program high, with 44 saying it is very good or good. More specifically, three-quarters say communication with the central office is very good or good and more than three-quarters say it is very good or good with the regional office. Furthermore, most States (37) rate overall coordination in the program as very good or good; at least two-thirds give this high rating to their coordination with both the central and regional offices.

A majority of States also give high ratings to their most recent contacts with both the central and regional offices, although ratings are somewhat higher for the latter. Three-quarters are satisfied with the accessibility, availability, and responsiveness of OCSE staff, as well as with the timeliness, helpfulness, and accuracy of the assistance they received.

Communication, coordination, and recent contacts are related to States' overall satisfaction. As States' ratings of each of these decrease, States' overall satisfaction with OCSE declines.

Additionally, nearly all States have asked OCSE for support over the past year, including help with new and existing policies, systems, and demonstration projects. The majority (at least two-thirds) say the help they received from OCSE was very good or good.

### ***States Believe OCSE Works With Them As Partners***

Half of the States believe the Child Support Enforcement Program is a true Federal/State partnership most of the time, and another quarter say it is a partnership some of the time. They say the increased emphasis on Federal and State partnership has greatly improved the program. Also, States believe the central office provides strong program expertise and leadership.

### ***Some Regional Offices Are Rated Higher Than Others***

While States rate some regional offices high, others receive mixed ratings. States which are more satisfied with their regional office value the State-specific support and commitment they get from these offices. On the other hand, States which are less satisfied with their regional office say they receive limited support, or that communication and coordination are weak.

### ***States Offer Specific Suggestions For Improving Their Relationship With OCSE***

States offer several suggestions which would increase their satisfaction with OCSE. Perhaps most importantly, many States say OCSE should improve the timeliness of communication with them. They also believe OCSE should strengthen the regional office role to give them stronger program support; some say this role is not adequately defined, and others believe the regions lack authority. Other States say communication with States further away from the central office can be improved. States would also like OCSE to provide more systems support, training and practical support, including enhanced appreciation of their problems with new child support initiatives and more detailed advice on how to implement regulations. Finally, States suggest continued improvement of the audit process and a more timely Annual Report to Congress.

## **CONCLUSION**

Overall, this report shows that States give OCSE high marks for its performance, particularly in recent years. But opportunities to improve remain, and the office should consider the suggestions cited by States to further improve its performance. By adopting a philosophy of customer service, OCSE has not only enhanced its support to the States, but also enriched the program as a whole.

## **COMMENTS**

We received comments on the draft report from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Assistant Secretary for Management and Budget (ASMB). The ACF believes the States' suggestions are pertinent and noted some of its efforts to work with the States to address them. Some parts of the report were modified in response to ASMB's technical comments.

The full comments are presented in Appendix B.

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# INTRODUCTION

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## PURPOSE

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## BACKGROUND

The Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) requested that we survey States to determine their experiences and satisfaction with OCSE and to identify any areas for improvement. This survey was one of the action items identified in a recently completed national Strategic Plan for the Child Support Enforcement Program.

### *Child Support Enforcement Program*

The Child Support Enforcement Program was established in 1975 under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. The goal of this program is to ensure that children, from both Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and non-TANF families, are financially supported by both parents. The major services provided by the program include: 1) locating noncustodial parents; 2) establishing paternity; 3) establishing child support obligations; and 4) enforcing child support orders.

The Child Support Enforcement Program is administered at the State level and is overseen Federally by OCSE. One of OCSE's primary roles is to fund, evaluate, and provide technical assistance to the States. The OCSE also sets program standards and policy, and provides guidance to States in implementing that policy. Additionally, it provides support for automated systems, research and demonstration projects, and operations.

The OCSE has a central office in Washington D.C. and 10 regional offices throughout the country. Each of these regional offices has a regional child support program manager who oversees a staff of child support enforcement program specialists. The structure and size of each regional office varies from region to region.

Although State agencies have considerable autonomy in administering services, Federal regulations specify minimum standards of program operation. In addition to providing the four major services listed above, States must also have procedures in place to maintain case records, establish medical support orders, withhold wages and taxes, and modify support orders. Federal regulations further require that these services be carried out in a timely manner.

The program has been growing since its inception. In fiscal year 1993, the program's caseload consisted of approximately 17 million cases, and almost 9 billion dollars in child support was collected. By 1995, the caseload had increased to over 19 million cases; monetary collections were up to 10.8 billion dollars.

Recently, the OCSE worked with its State partners to develop a Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 1995-1999. The plan emphasizes both the coordination of service delivery systems and the forging of new partnerships at all levels to make the Child Support Enforcement Program more results-oriented and responsive to customers.

### ***Welfare Reform***

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-193 welfare reform) contains comprehensive child support enforcement provisions. Welfare reform legislation requires that each State do the following:

- participate in a national new hire reporting system;
- develop a streamlined system for establishing paternity;
- adopt a uniform interstate child support law;
- establish computerized statewide collections;
- exercise tougher penalties for nonpayment;
- follow a "families first" policy; and
- create access and visitation programs.

Welfare reform legislation also proposes the establishment of a performance-based incentive funding system for the States. The Department's proposal recommends that State programs be evaluated on five key performance areas: paternity establishment; support order establishment; collection of current support; collection of arrearages; and cost effectiveness. Each State would be paid an incentive based on its score on these measures. This new system would replace the current one, which provides an incentive payment to all States based on the ratio of child support dollars collected to program dollars expended. The existing system had been criticized for being an inaccurate measure of State performance.

### ***Other OIG Work***

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) has completed several studies of the Child Support Enforcement Program over the past several years. These have included reports on paternity establishment, income tax reductions, and State data systems. The latter, finalized in December 1996, identified obstacles States faced in automating their data systems, such as inadequate technology and problems with contractors.

## **METHODOLOGY**

We conducted 54 structured telephone interviews in October and November 1997 with respondents from all 50 States, as well as the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the United States Virgin Islands. In reporting our findings, we also refer to the latter four as "States."

We spoke to the child support program director in 47 of the 54 States; in 7 States where we did not interview the director, they declined mostly because they were new to their position and did not feel they had enough experience to respond to our questions. In these cases, they designated



an experienced manager as the lead respondent. For 26 States, we had multiple respondents, often a deputy director, policy specialist, systems specialist, or attorney, in addition to the director. In the remaining 28 States, we interviewed just one individual.

In our interviews, we asked respondents questions about communication, coordination, and satisfaction with OCSE. We did not provide respondents with a common definition of OCSE's role, but instead asked States about their own understanding and expectations. We also asked more specific questions on various child support initiatives, Federal audits, the strategic plan, and the Annual Report to Congress. For most questions, respondents were asked to differentiate their answers between the central and regional offices.

We also constructed a regional office index using data from the State interviews. This index was based on three variables - States' overall satisfaction with their regional office, States' rating of communication with their region, and States' rating of coordination with their region. We gave each variable a subscore which were then combined to give a total score for each region. This index is explained in greater detail in Appendix A.

Finally, we selected 6 States for on-site visits: Colorado, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, South Carolina and Texas. These case studies will be presented in a separate follow-up report.

This inspection was conducted in accordance with the **Quality Standards for Inspections** issued by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency.

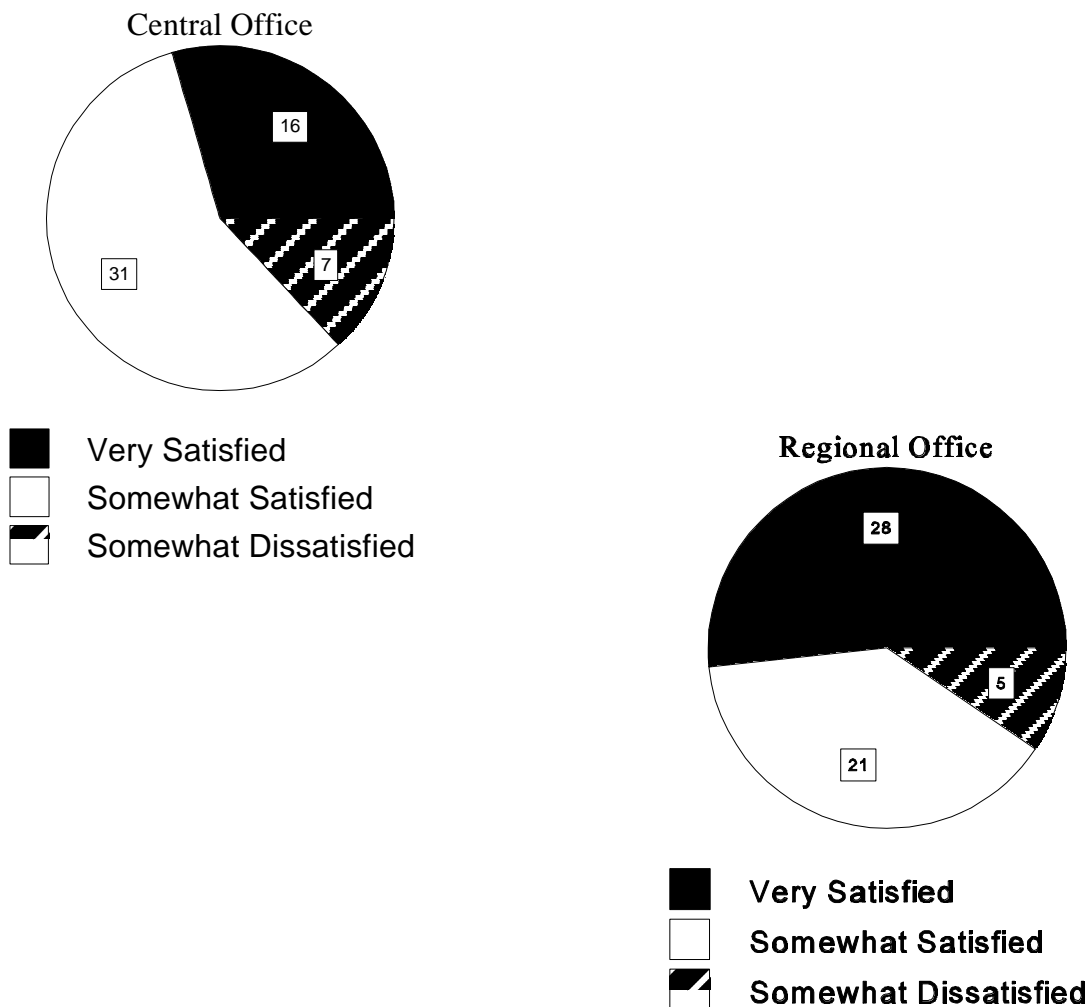
# FINDINGS

## MOST STATES ARE SATISFIED OVERALL

States are satisfied overall with both the central and regional OCSE offices. See Graph A below. Forty-seven States are very or somewhat satisfied with the central office. Of these 47 States, 16 are very satisfied and 31 are somewhat satisfied. Another seven States are somewhat dissatisfied with the central office, and none are very dissatisfied.

Similar to their rating of the central office, a large majority of States are also satisfied overall with their regional office. Forty-nine States are very or somewhat satisfied with their region; of the 49, 28 are very satisfied and 21 are somewhat satisfied. Another five States are somewhat dissatisfied with their region, while no State is very dissatisfied.

Graph A  
Satisfaction With Central And Regional Offices



As illustrated in Graph A, the intensity of satisfaction differs between the central and regional offices. This difference carries over in some of our other data, as can be seen in Tables A and B.

Our analysis also reveals minor differences in overall satisfaction based on State caseload size, program structure and administrative position of the child support program.

States' satisfaction with OCSE has increased over the past two years. Forty-four States say their level of satisfaction with the central office has increased, six say it has remained the same, and 4 say it has decreased. Additionally, 28 States say their satisfaction with their regional office has increased over the past two years, 20 say it has remained the same (almost all of whom say they are just as satisfied), and 5 say it has decreased. The remaining State did not have an opinion.

## STATES RATE THEIR RECENT EXPERIENCES HIGH

### *Communication*

States rate overall communication within the Child Support Enforcement Program high, with 44 saying it is very good or good. Nine say it is average, and one says it is poor. Table A below shows States' satisfaction with communication with both the central and regional offices.

Table A  
Rating of Communication

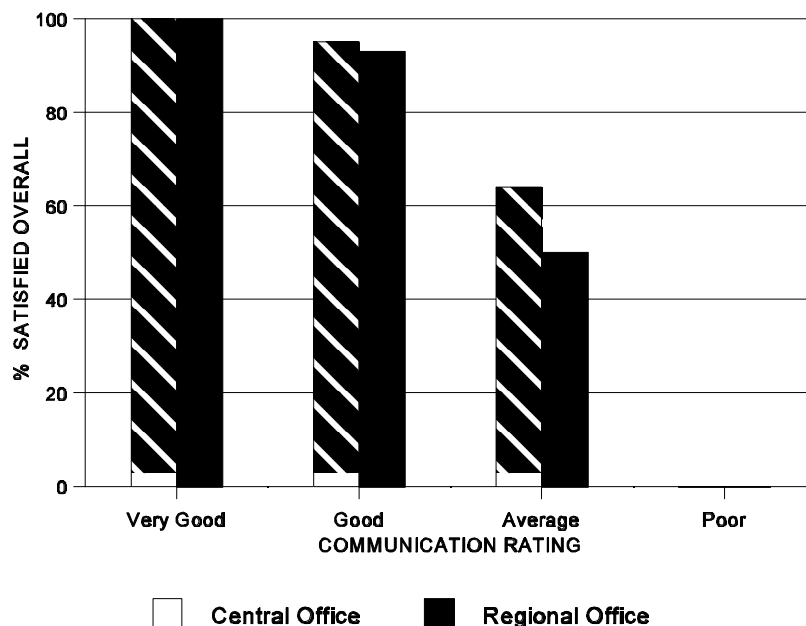
	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor	Don't Know
<b>Central Office</b>	20	19	11	2	0	2
<b>Regional Office</b>	32	14	8	0	0	0

At least 49 States describe the communication they get from the central office as very or somewhat helpful, clear, or accurate; fewer (42), however, rate the communication as timely. At least 48 States say their communication with the regional office is very or somewhat helpful, clear or timely; all States say it is accurate.

States say they rate communication high because OCSE is willing to listen to them, is responsive to their requests and concerns, and is available to help them when needed. They also say their good working relationship with OCSE staff makes communication good. Furthermore, many States believe communication in the Child Support Enforcement Program has improved over the past several years. On the other hand, States more dissatisfied with their communication cite a lack of timeliness and detail, too much bureaucracy, and insufficient program knowledge as reasons for their dissatisfaction.

States' rating of communication is related to their overall satisfaction. See Graph B below.

Graph B  
**States' Overall Satisfaction Declines as Their Communication Rating Decreases**



Most State communication with OCSE is for policy-related issues. Forty-five States cite this as a reason for their most recent contact with the central office and 39 say this is a reason for their most recent contact with the regional office. In fact, about half of the States say program policy is the main topic of their discussions with both the central and regional offices. Other reasons for contacting the central office include systems, workgroups, and funding issues. Other reasons States contact the regional office include case specific support, regional meetings, technical assistance, and reporting. Most States (42) communicate more with their regional office than with the central office. Forty-five States are in contact with their region on a daily or weekly basis, compared to only 22 States who interact with the central office that frequently.

States report that subject matter should dictate the form of communication. They believe that written documents are most useful to communicate policy and legislative matters, and that conference calls are helpful when State discussion and input is needed or when discussing regulations. Additionally, States say individual calls are most useful for case specific questions. States also find e-mail, in-person visits, and the IV-D link helpful.

### ***Coordination***

State satisfaction with coordination (State and Federal efforts to work together), while high, is not as high as it is with communication. Most (37) say overall coordination within the program is

very good or good. Another 15 say it is average, while one State rates coordination as poor. Table B below gives the coordination satisfaction ratings of States with both the central and regional offices.

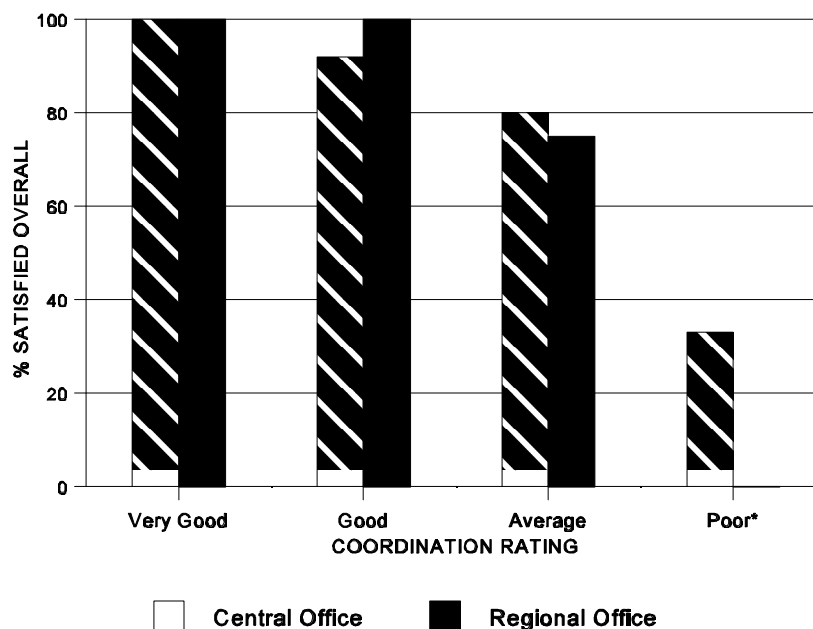
Table B  
Rating of Coordination

	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor	Don't Know	Other
Central Office	10	24	15	3	0	2	0
Regional Office	26	12	12	1	0	1	2

States explain their high ratings of coordination by pointing out their partnership with OCSE. They also say that coordination has improved due mostly to the willingness of OCSE to work together with them to achieve common goals. Other States, however, cite the difficulty in coordinating all the different players in the Child Support Enforcement Program and the lack of coordination between these different players as reasons why coordination is not strong.

Graph C below shows how States' assessment of coordination is related to their overall satisfaction.

Graph C  
States' Overall Satisfaction Declines as Their Coordination Rating Decreases



\*No States rate coordination with regional office as poor.

### ***Recent Contacts***

A majority of States give high ratings to their most recent contacts with both the central and regional offices, although ratings are somewhat higher for the latter. States' overall satisfaction decreases as their ratings of each of the aspects below drops. Table C illustrates the number of States that are very or somewhat satisfied with each office on specific aspects of their contacts.

Table C  
**Number of States Satisfied With Recent Contacts**

<b><u>Aspect of Contact</u></b>	<b><u>Central Office</u></b>	<b><u>Regional Office</u></b>
Ability to reach someone	47	47
Timeliness of assistance	46	49
Responsiveness	46	52
Helpfulness of assistance	44	52
Accuracy of response	47	52
Extent to which needs met	47	52

### ***General Support***

States have asked OCSE for different types of support over the past year. Table D below illustrates the type of help States have asked for and their assessment of how good that help was.

Table D  
**Quality of Support**

<b><u>Type of Support</u></b>	<b><u>States Asking for Support</u></b>	<b><u>States Rating Support Very Good or Good</u></b>
Interpreting existing policies	53	83%
Explaining new policies	53	70%
Systems	45	71%
Implementing new policies	31	81%
Research or demonstration project	27	81%
Evaluating program	19	68%
Customer service initiative	14	79%

### ***Support Provided On Welfare Reform***

States are also pleased with the help they have received from OCSE on welfare reform. Most say this help has been in the form of policy communications, implementation documents, legislative guides, workgroups, and other technical assistance. A majority of States (42) rate the help received on welfare reform so far as very good or good. Some States do, however, mention further assistance they would like with welfare reform. One-third would like more information on specific topics such as the Financial Institutions Data Match, or more timely decisions on new welfare reform regulations in general.

### **STATES BELIEVE OCSE WORKS WITH THEM AS PARTNERS**

#### ***States View The Child Support Enforcement Program As More Of A Partnership Than Before***

When asked to evaluate the extent to which they believe the Child Support Enforcement program is a true Federal/State partnership, about half (29) say the program is a partnership most of the time, 11 say it is a partnership some times, and another 14 say most of the time the program is not a partnership. In fact, 10 States volunteer this increased emphasis on partnership as a major strength of the central office. As one State program director says, there is "more spirit of cooperation" between the Federal office and the States.

States believe the increased emphasis on Federal and State partnership has greatly improved the Child Support Enforcement Program. Some say OCSE is more willing to listen and talk with States, while others view the program as more of a joint venture than they used to in the past.

States' assessment of the program as a partnership also influences their overall satisfaction with OCSE. Most States (60 percent) that are satisfied overall with OCSE believe the program is a partnership most of the time, while in contrast only 3 percent of States that are dissatisfied overall believe the same.

Two-thirds of States believe that Federal and State roles in the Child Support Enforcement Program are adequately defined. The remaining third do not believe these roles are adequately defined. Most of these States believe the Federal office has an undefined or evolving role in assisting States; a few suggest that OCSE play a stronger role in the program, such as being a stronger public advocate for the program and lobbying for more funding. Several States also recognize the challenge in reconciling a monitoring role with a partnership role. Others mention that the Federal office needs to understand and appreciate the differences that exist among State programs; however, they do acknowledge the challenge in recognizing these differences while trying to develop national policies.

#### ***States Particularly Like Recent Collaborative Efforts With OCSE***

Most States say recent collaborative efforts with OCSE illustrate the willingness of OCSE to work more with them as partners. Many mention the formation of welfare reform workgroups, comprised of Federal and State representatives, as working very well. More specifically, two-

thirds volunteer that the collaborative process used to develop the new incentive funding rules was a good one, and another quarter volunteer that the process was also positive for the New Hire Directory. One child support program director says that there was "lots of opportunity to provide formal and informal feedback" while the incentive funding rules were being developed; another remarks this process was "HHS at its best, a real partnership."

Additionally, States offer positive feedback about the program's strategic planning process, which occurred in 1995; almost all have been informed about the plan. Half of the States feel favorably about the strategic planning process and believe the plan has had a positive effect on their relationship with the central and regional offices by promoting partnership or improving communication. Another half of States believe the plan has had a positive effect on their relationship with their regional office for the same reasons. On the other hand, one-quarter of States had little or no involvement in the strategic planning process and the remaining quarter of States either feel negatively or have mixed reactions.

Finally, States rate the biannual Administration for Children and Families (ACF) users group systems conferences high. Forty-four say these conferences have been very or somewhat helpful. Some of these States cite the practical knowledge gained at these conferences as particularly useful.

### ***States Believe The Central Office Provides Strong Program Expertise And Leadership***

When asked about the strengths of the central office, the most frequently cited strength is their program expertise (24 States). In particular, many States cite the program knowledge and commitment of central office staff as assets. Nearly half of the States (24) volunteer that they have a good working relationship with the central office, and an equal number of States believe the central office to be responsive.

Some States also note the strong leadership the central office provides for the program. In particular, States mention the leadership provided both by Judge Ross and by the central office staff. Furthermore, a few States say the central office is a strong child support advocate with Congress.

## **SOME REGIONAL OFFICES ARE RATED HIGHER THAN OTHERS**

### ***Regional Office Ratings Vary Greatly***

While overall satisfaction with the regional offices is high, States do rate some regional offices higher than others. As discussed in our methodology, we created a regional office index, based on States' ratings of communication, coordination and overall satisfaction with their region (see Appendix A for a more detailed discussion of this index). This index shows that while all regions are generally above average, in comparison to each other, three regions are rated low, four are rated in the middle, and three are rated the high.



### ***States Satisfied With Their Regional Office Appreciate Its Practical Support And Commitment***

States which are more satisfied with their regional office value the State-specific support they get from that office. They believe that regional staff are very committed to the success of their State program. Several States mention that regional staff have greater sensitivity to the complexities of the State than does the central office. In fact, 24 States report that a main strength of their regional office is their commitment to or understanding of the State's program. As one respondent says, the regional office has an "understanding of States' situations and knows States' quirks." Other strengths cited include helpfulness (18), technical knowledge (13) and good communication (13). A few States report that despite some weaknesses in the regional office, the staff person assigned to their State is strong.

### ***States Less Satisfied With Their Regional Office Do Not Like The Lack Of Communication And Support***

States which are not as satisfied with their regional office say they receive limited support from their region, and that communication and coordination between them are weak. Other weaknesses of the regional offices States mention include a lack of staffing resources and inadequate program expertise. States also say weaker regional offices do not provide adequate leadership or guidance.

## **STATES OFFER SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH OCSE**

### ***Improve The Timeliness Of Communication***

Many States believe that OCSE is not always timely in its communication. This is the most common problem States have. Thirty-six States are dissatisfied with either the timeliness of responses or with the timeliness of getting new program regulations from OCSE; nine States are dissatisfied with both. While most States would like more timely regulations in general, a few do cite specific examples of regulations or information and guidance they believe have not been timely, including specifications for systems requirements, New Hire Directory, and the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act. Additionally, several States believe regulations have not been timely so far for the Federal Case Registry, which has an implementation deadline of October 1998.

Concerns about timeliness lower States' overall satisfaction with the central office in particular. Six of the seven States who are dissatisfied overall with the central office believe regulations are not timely, while less than half of the States who are satisfied overall think this is a problem.

### ***Strengthen The Regional Office Role To Give States Stronger Program Support***

Some States raise concerns about the regional offices. Some States (15) cite the regional office's lack of authority, as illustrated in one respondent's remark that the regional office "has no real authority and can't give us definite answers." These States specifically offer this as a main

weakness of the regional office. Often, States say, regional offices cannot give definitive answers because they have to check with the central office first. A few States bypass the region altogether, saying that it is faster to go directly to the central office rather than involve an intermediary.

Additionally, a few States (4) also believe that regional offices lack a clearly defined role in the Child Support Enforcement Program. Says one respondent, "I have no idea what regional staff does." Some note that regional OCSE staffs are located within the regional ACF and report to ACF's regional administrator; these States therefore feel that no clear chain of command exists between all players in the Child Support Enforcement Program. Furthermore, according to several States, regional offices are sometimes left out of the loop, thus decreasing their effectiveness in helping the States. In fact, several States say they get program information (e.g., updates on new initiatives) before their regional office does. In such instances, these States say regional staff are not knowledgeable and are unable to give support in a timely manner.

A few States (6) also believe that the relationship between the central and regional offices is not as good as it should be. These States believe this weakness can adversely affect program operation. For example, some States receive conflicting information from the two offices, resulting in uncertainty about program policy.

In order to develop a clearer and more useful role for the regional office, some States offer suggestions for the types of support regional offices could provide that would be especially helpful. They think that regional offices should develop specialists in the areas of technical assistance and program implementation. Some States mention that central office specialists often do not understand the intricacies of their particular State, and believe that regional staff may understand States better. A few States mention that regional staff could compile "best practices" of States in the region more efficiently than the current practice of each State reporting to the central office.

### ***Provide More Systems Support and Training***

Some States would like more systems support from OCSE. In particular, they express several concerns related to systems. Twenty-six States indicate some dissatisfaction with the timeliness of systems regulations; they believe they did not receive sufficient information in time to meet deadlines for new systems requirements. Furthermore, 10 States rate the recent help they have received with their management information systems as being average, poor, or very poor, and one-third of the 38 States with recent on-site technical assistance rate this assistance as average, poor or very poor. Fifteen States volunteer that they would like either more or better systems support, specifically more on-site technical assistance, more detailed guidance, and better technical expertise.

Seventeen States indicate that they would also like more training from OCSE. In particular, some States mention training on the Internet, self-audit, and legal issues. Others say they would like more training in general, while a few mention they would like OCSE to develop training materials that they can use to train State program staff.

### ***Improve Communication To States Further Away From The Central Office***

Some States also believe that distance from the central office can be a barrier to communication. "The further away you get from central office," remarks one child support program director, "the more problems you have with respect to getting information." The six States that are dissatisfied with the extent to which their communication needs have been met in recent OCSE contacts are all at least 350 miles from central office; four are more than 1,000 miles from central office. States that are furthest away from the central office are also more likely to be dissatisfied with their ability to reach someone in central office and the timeliness of assistance they receive. Some States also find that distance interferes with in-person communication. As another director from the West Coast says, "We don't see our Federal partners as much as New England States do."

Furthermore, seven States volunteer that they have difficulty arranging out of State travel. They believe such restrictions not only impede communication with central office, but also hinder State participation in conferences and workgroups. Says one respondent, "It is very useful to attend conferences, but out of State travel is just not possible given the State's political climate."

### ***Provide More Practical Support***

Eighteen States say OCSE should provide more practical support to the States, including more specific guidance on how to implement regulations. Most of these mention that the central office in particular lacks a practical understanding of how the program works and do not understand the problems States face. Others say they want more detailed, practical advice on how to implement new initiatives and policy changes. Some examples of where States would like specific, practical advice are with implementing welfare reform and interstate compacts.

These concerns impact both States' overall satisfaction and their sense of partnership with OCSE. States who want more practical support are less likely than other States to be satisfied overall with the central office. Similarly, States who say OCSE should provide more practical support are less likely to believe the program is a Federal/State partnership most of the time.

### ***Enhance OCSE Appreciation Of State Problems With New Child Support Initiatives***

Some States illustrate their concern with OCSE's lack of practical support by citing difficulties that they have faced in implementing the Financial Institutions Data Match, Administrative Offset, and other administrative processes in general. Five States volunteer that original regulations for the Financial Institutions Data Match were burdensome to implement. Says one child support program director, "We need help fighting with the banks for Financial Data Match. It should have been fought at the Federal level instead of States having to fight bank by bank." Nine States express problems with Administrative Offset, and most States say much of the blame for these problems was not with OCSE. They do say implementation of the initiative was rushed. Says another director who has struggled with the initiative, "More piloting is needed." Finally, 5 States express concern over other administrative processes and State due process requirements. In some cases, the concerns reflect resistant State legislatures or judiciaries. In other cases, the concern is wider in scope. "Pushing administrative process in order to speed things up," says one

respondent, “puts enormous power in the hands of people who don’t know what they are doing. It will lead to serious legal issues in the future.”

### ***Continue To Improve The Audit Process***

States have some concerns about their past audits, although they do recognize that a new process will shortly be implemented and are optimistic that this new process will resolve their concerns. Seven States believe that their most recent audit was not done appropriately and 14 say it was not useful. Some of these States say that the audit focused too much on details rather than take a broader perspective and did not provide them with useful feedback on how to improve their program.

States with audit concerns are more likely to be in some regions than in others. At least half of the States in three regions say their most recent audit was inappropriately conducted and/or was not useful, while no State in three other regions had such concerns.

States offer various suggestions for improving OCSE audits. These range from making the audits more timely and relevant to making them more outcome-based. Some States believe that audits should be conducted more consistently throughout the country, and others say they should include some component of self-assessment.

### ***Make The Annual Report to Congress More Timely***

States also report dissatisfaction with the timeliness of the Child Support Enforcement Annual Report to Congress. Forty-three States say the report is not timely and say the report would be more useful if it were more timely. Some States also express concern about the accuracy of the data in the report, with 18 States finding it to be inaccurate. Beyond improving the timeliness and accuracy of the report, 9 States suggest a more narrow focus, and 8 States request more explanation of the data contained in the report.

## **CONCLUSION**

Overall, this report shows that States give OCSE high marks for its performance, particularly in recent years. But opportunities to improve remain, and the office should consider the suggestions cited by States to further improve its performance. By adopting a philosophy of customer service, OCSE has not only enhanced its support to the States, but also enriched the program as a whole.

## **COMMENTS**

We received comments on the draft report from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Assistant Secretary for Management and Budget (ASMB). The ACF believes the States’ suggestions are pertinent and noted some of its efforts to work with the States to address them. Some parts of the report were modified in response to ASMB’s technical comments.

The full comments are presented in Appendix B.

# APPENDIX A

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## REGIONAL OFFICE INDEX

The regional office index is based on the scores achieved by each region from all of its States on the following three variables:

- (1) mean of States' overall satisfaction with regional office
- (2) mean of States' rating of communication with regional office
- (3) mean of States' rating of coordination with regional office

Mean scores on each variable could range from 1 to 4, with 4 being the highest score and 1 being the lowest.

### (1) *Overall Satisfaction With Regional Office*

The overall satisfaction score was based on States' overall satisfaction with the regional Office of Child Support Enforcement. We scored each State's level of satisfaction using the following system:

<u>Rating</u>	<u>Satisfaction Score</u>
Very Satisfied	4
Somewhat Satisfied	3
Somewhat Dissatisfied	2
Very Dissatisfied	1

### (2) *Communication With Regional Office*

The communication score was based States' rating of communication with the regional office. We scored each State's rating using the following system:

<u>Rating</u>	<u>Communication Score</u>
Very Good	4
Good	3
Average	2
Poor	1

(3) *Coordination With Regional Office*

The coordination score was based on States' rating of coordination with the regional office. We scored each State's rating using the following system:

<u>Rating</u>	<u>Coordination Score</u>
Very Good	4
Good	3
Average	2
Poor	1

After scoring the regions on each of the three variables, we added the three scores together to give a total score for each region. Scores ranged from 8.25 to 11.15, with a mean score of 10.13. We then assigned the 10 regions into the following three groups based on their total score:

<u>Group</u>	<u># Of Regions In Group</u>	<u>Range of Scores</u>
Low	3	8 - 9.5
Middle	4	9.6 - 10.5
High	3	10.6 - 12

## APPENDIX B

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In this appendix, we present in full the comments from the Administration for Children and Families and the Assistant Secretary for Management and Budget.



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
Office of the Assistant Secretary, Suite 600  
370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20447

August 3, 1998

TO: June Gibbs Brown  
Inspector General

FROM: Olivia A. Golden  
Assistant Secretary  
for Children and Families

SUBJECT: OIG Draft Report "Child Support Enforcement State Satisfaction Survey,"  
(OEI-02-97-00310)

IG  
EAIG  
SAIG  
PDIG  
DIG-AS  
DIG-EC  
DIG-EI  
DIG-OT  
DIG-MP  
AIG-LC  
OGC/GO  
ExecSec  
Date Sent 8/5/98

1998 AUG -5 A 11:03  
OFFICE OF INSPECTION  
GENERAL

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your draft report of findings concerning the States' level of satisfaction with the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), and to identify opportunities to improve its services to the States. We apologize for the delay in providing this response. If you have questions, please contact David Gray Ross, Commissioner, Office of Child Support Enforcement, at (202) 401-9370.

Attachment



COMMENTS OF THE ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ON  
THE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL DRAFT REPORT, "CHILD SUPPORT  
ENFORCEMENT STATE SATISFACTION SURVEY" (OEI-02-97-00310).

General Comments

It should be noted that OCSE requested this survey to be carried out as part of its customer satisfaction initiative. This draft report is based on structured interviews with respondents from all 50 States, as well as the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. In most cases the respondent is the child support program director. Generally, answers are differentiated between the federal central OCSE and regional child support staff. We are pleased to observe that the survey found States to be satisfied overall with both the central and regional OCSE offices: 47 States are satisfied overall with the services of the central office, while 49 States are satisfied overall with the services of their regional offices. We are also pleased to find that the level of States' satisfaction with OCSE has increased over the past two years and that States single out OCSE's program expertise, partnership activities, and good listening habits for special comment.

Technical Comments

Even though States are satisfied overall with OCSE's performance, they have made a number of suggestions to enhance the relationship. These suggestions concern timeliness of communication; strengthening the regional office role; providing increased systems support; improving communication with States far from central office; providing more "practical" support; enhancing OCSE's appreciation of States' problems with new initiatives; improving the audit process; and making the Annual Report to Congress more timely.

We consider these suggestions generally to be pertinent. At the same time, we would like to put on the record OCSE's efforts to move ahead in some of these areas--in a few cases with notable success. These include: weekly video conferences with regional office senior managers on matters of agency priority; making the certification of States' systems the agency's number one goal for the current fiscal year, an effort for which OCSE received high marks in a recent General Accounting Office report; new initiatives directed toward financial institutions, employers, and technology development; helping States to develop their capability to take on the responsibilities of self-assessment reviews; and requesting the OIG to survey user feedback on OCSE's Annual Report to Congress. A working draft report has been issued, which finds that, overall, users are satisfied with and rely on the Annual Report.

We have no further comments, other than to express our appreciation for the professional manner in which OIG gathered data and prepared the report and for the States' cooperation and frankness in responding to questions.



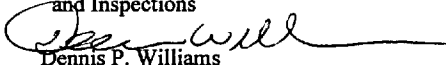
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Office of the Secretary

Washington, D.C. 20201

MAY 8 1998

**MEMORANDUM TO:** George Grob  
Deputy Inspector General for Evaluation  
and Inspections

**FROM:**   
Dennis P. Williams  
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Budget

**SUBJECT:** Comments on Draft OIG Report "Child Support Enforcement  
State Satisfaction Survey"

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft OIG report entitled "Child Support Enforcement State Satisfaction Survey (Ref. OIE-02-97-00310). While we believe that the report overall was well done and contains much useful information, we have a few comments about both the manner in which the information was collected and the presentation of the results.

Manner of Data Collection

With respect to the manner of data collection, we believe that the collection of this information has Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) implications. As we have recently discussed, we encourage you to establish a coherent OIG-wide approach to compliance with PRA requirements.

Presentation of the Results

While the report provides useful insight into the relationship between OCSE and the States, provision of more information on the survey instrument would enhance the report considerably. The report should include the list of questions asked and more detail on the answers including the actual scale response.

Also, the discussion of the regions on page 10 seems somewhat misleading. Appendix A which describes the "Regional Office Index" would seem to indicate that the "poorest" performing regions actually fell between high average and good performance. We recommend that the discussion on page 10 be revised to provide actual ratings descriptions.

Finally, a technical note, while welfare reform legislation proposed the establishment of a performance based incentive funding system, the five evaluation measures were reported in the HHS report to Ways and Means on Child Support Enforcement Incentive Funding, not as part of the legislation. Page 2 of your draft report incorrectly states the above information and should be revised.

We hope our comments have been useful. Questions can be addressed to Frank Burns on 690-6353.